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VALUE OF A HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WALTER R. BACON

The study and preservation of the History of California is the chief object of this society, and I present you these few words for the purpose of fixing attention upon this object, and demonstrating the utility of the society, as one of the conservators of good government, and a considerable factor in the advancement of civilization, and if this is shown, each member should require himself to devote such share of his time and energy to its advancement as is proportionate to the importance of the object and results.

No country or community advances except through the patriotism of its people; it might be said, the *intelligent* patriotism of its people. Patriotism is love of country, and intelligent patriotism is only possible when the patriot knows of the lives, deeds and characters of the citizens of his country who have served it as to make it worthy of his patriotic love. Love of home is inherent in humanity whether savage or civilized, but love of country is the property only of those peoples who have so far advanced as to make realities of abstract ideas, and then should only be present when something in the history of that country and its people has placed it in a position entitling it to be held as an example worthy of emulation by civilized men.

We love our country because certain men in humble station more than three hundred and fifty years ago chose it as a place in which to set up and put in force the simple doctrine that men must be allowed freedom of conscience in the worship of God, and because the descendants of these men and others of kindred belief taking hold of that doctrine as a verity and as established of God himself, added to it certain concomitant deductions including the declaration that "all men are created equal and endowed by the Creator with inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and in this land of ours, with singleness of purpose, fought out the fight against the doctrines conceived of old by devils in the human form of Kings and self-appointed spiritual rulers to which their short creed was opposed.

They triumphed, but it only through history that we know of it; it is only through history and tradition which is one form of history, that we even know that George Washington ever lived and

by his military genius and steadfastness wrested the political control of this country from the Crown of England, and as President afterwards, set an example of the ruler great enough to efface itself; do nothing but for the present welfare and future glory of his country, and silently endure the malicious carping of small critics, in order that his far-reaching plans of state might be discussed and adopted by the people out of self-knowledge—only exercised by free men. The great deeds of those gone before have ever been the inspiration to good deeds by the living, but without history to chronicle and hand them down, so far as the later generations go, they may as well never have been enacted, for without knowledge of them there can be no incentive drawn from them. Herodotus has been called the Father of History; he it was who first refused to be content with the chronicle of the names of reigning Kings, and survivors of battles, but supplemented these by philosophical deductions, showing what led up to and what flowed from these battles, and with reflections upon the effect upon his people of the acts or line of policy of the King.

In forecasting results of state policy, we judge largely, almost solely, of what the future will bring forth by what the past has accomplished, and this we can only know by consulting history. The fine flower of endeavor is best nourished in the light of accomplishment of others, and these are the things seized upon by history and by it crystallized—preserved, as in the clear amber, and held up to us to be forever emulated.

"If at first you don't succeed, try again," is a trite saying and contains good advice, but without example and illustration, is absolutely without value to the great majority, and for these examples and illustrations we turn almost solely to history. Who has ever read Xenophen's account of the march of the ten thousand Greeks without feeling the thrill of emulation always excited by the recitation of brave deeds, and without retaining something which in the time of trial rises within him and gives him courage.

As I have intimated, abstract ideas are verities; we are guided by them, in fact we worship them. The deeds of great men gone, in time come to represent ideas; in fact become ideas, and under the clarifying and refining treatment of history we treat them in the abstract. It is the faculty of doing this that marks the line between brute instinct and human intelligence; in the knowledge of this faculty the great dramatists write and present their plays. There are none of us but can enjoy and appreciate the dramatic or tragic play in which but a mere suggestion of a point is made by the words of

the actor, but which with the aid of the cultivated imagination of the hearer, becomes a living sentient idea embracing the whole range of man's life and the entire scope of his passions. It is this faculty that enables us to personify freedom and typify patriotism in our flag, so that while in view of the stars and stripes on any occasion, a mere suggestion of its origin and office, sets in motion a train of thought that sends burning impulses from head to heart and stirs the soul to its very foundations.

Our society is engaged in searching out and preserving the history of this corner of the United States. This means the correct chronicling of the lives of the early explorers, who by their hardihood and perseverance first reached and spied out the land, and in almost inspired prophecy foretold something of its future glory. It means looking into the lives of those later comers, some of whom are still with us and are known by the honorable title of pioneers; it means the faithful recounting of their deeds accomplished under difficulties; the analysis of their steadfast characters and robust personalities, and the holding up to us in an intelligent manner an epitomized statement of the results of their trials, their labors, their sacrifices, and their triumphs, to be an inspiration to us, their contemporaries and eventually their successors, to go forward in the straight path of unwearied effort.

And the lives of these have a special significance to us. They lived under the same skies that we now see; we see the same mountains as shadowed them, and while the face of the country now has no resemblance to its condition as they found it, we need only take a short journey to the eastward to find one that has, and be made forcibly to realize something of the effort involved in producing the change.

So local history has special local significance, and its study and knowledge will be of special value to those of this land, and a faithful chronicle of the lives and deeds of the discoverers and pioneers of this country can have but one effect upon those who read it, *i. e.*, to be an inspiration to follow their virtues and avoid their mistakes and vices.

History is at once scientific and philosophic. Its chief province is the fashioning and formulation out of past events, rules for future guidance in the administration of the state, and its chief beauty as a philosophy is that it is eclectic, in that it sets before its disciples the examples of the past and leaves to the cultivated intelligence of each their interpretation and future application.

Until after Herodotus and Thucydides history was but a more

or less accurate statement of the wonderful acts of individuals, the great public convulsions or picturesque occurrences, and it was only as far away as the latter part of the eighteenth century that the humane philosophy of that period evolved the idea, that the intrigues and scandals of courts and the shock of armies, are only important in proportion to their effect on the well being of the entire community, so that now these things instead of being considered the sole object of historical inquiry, are only of value for the indications they give of the primal causes on which the march of history depends, and now a writer of general history must exhibit the moral and social conditions of a nation with the same clearness and certainty as that pertaining to his dates of the changes in dynasties.

This change in the scope and purpose of history has made necessary, important modifications in historical composition and greatly extended the range of accomplishments requisite for the historian, until now to write passable history the writer must first be a person of broad general knowledge and culture, thoroughly grounded in the knowledge of universal or general history, possessed of the philosophical faculty, and in addition, have the capacity for hard work and infinite painstaking.

Without the aid of the vivid pictures of the great English writers, of the policies, conditions and events, that lead up to the meeting of the barons and King John at Runnymede, the value of the great charter escapes us, and without knowing something of the lives of Nathaniel Bacon, Patrick Henry, Sam Adams and their contemporaries, the Declaration of Independence is but a mass of inane platitudes, but read in the light of their enunciations and contentions and in view of a critical knowledge of the wide difference in physical conditions and social and political pretensions of the colonists and their oppressors, it at once takes on its aspect of sublimity and uniqueness among all the written declarations of the civil and religious rights of man in all his history. So we hold that there is and must be a philosophy of history.

From the discovery of the tables of Justinian in the thirteenth century dates the beginning of the present period of intellectual activity, but hampered by traditions of conservatism, four centuries of effort of the great thinkers of the race were required to so leaven the mass of human knowledge, as to bring us to that perfection in ways of thinking, and in conception of civil rights that allow full swing to individual effort, which has culminated in achievements during the century just closing of such incalculable advan-

tage to the race, as to almost stagger our power of comprehension when we attempt to forecast the future in its light.

A complete inventory of the good points gained in that century of advancement can only be made by philosophical historical appliances. Historical philosophy alone can tabulate the mistakes, point out the pitfalls to be avoided, fully appraise the advantages gained and mark a course for future pursuit which will preserve to us the best and discard the valueless. The limits of a paper to be read in fifteen minutes proscribe further examples of my meaning, but I think that small reflection will convince us all of the value of history, and that in local history a society is the only means for its collection and preservation, the extent of its interest is determined by local boundaries, which limitation will not warrant the publication by private enterprise of purely local histories.

The Society fosters interest in the subject among the people, and develops power of historic research and statement among its members; it defrays the expense of publication of local historical sketches, and thus preserves to the future the early history of the country, and at the same time renders it available for study in the present. In addition, our society owes a duty to the future of more than local importance, it is now or soon will be the conservator of historic articles more fully illustrating the domestic life of the pastoral period of Southern California, than any other collection in existence; it will be the duty of this society to find a permanent abiding place for these which will form an historical Museum that will constitute a primal fountain of information respecting one of the most interesting historic periods of the near past. Upon this society will also fall the labor of cataloguing this museum so that the future student of history may there readily find an illustrated statement of past industrial and domestic art, chronologically arranged and indexed for reference. This society is now also the conservator of a great number of newspaper files, books, pamphlets and manuscripts, which owing to lack of proper storage are in some confusion and in danger of loss, which must be preserved, catalogued, and indexed for future use. For this purpose some spacious, properly arranged and fire proof rooms are necessary. The city should furnish them, but never will until we have a society with the energy and membership sufficient for a long, strong pull. There are other things which will devolve on this society for the doing, in fact, the list is so long that we will not try to itemize the general statement of its objects, purposes and uses.

I think that the mere calling to your attention of the existence

and resources of this society is sufficient to excite your friendly interest in its future. The poorest and meanest of our citizens have a direct interest in its success, how much more imperative then that the more intelligent and capable should manifest by their works an interest commensurate with their responsibilities. One of our chief resources and equipments for work has been and is our honored Secretary, Mr. J. M. Guinn, who, with his gift of concentration of energy and his genius for hard work, has evolved order out of chaos in our local history, has set before us in logical sequence the significant events which make history, and with his faculty for scientific discernment has analyzed and portrayed the characters who made the events. His hands have been loyally upheld for years by our associates of long standing membership, with Mr. H. D. Barrows at their head. Let us later members join heartily in this work and assume our share of the burden, let us advertise the society and exploit its schemes, let us excite public interest to the increase of our membership and the funds in our treasury, in short, let us do those things that will demonstrate our belief in the value of the historical society to the community, and when this is done the future historian cannot complain of us that we scattered the landmarks and historical material intrusted to us, which we should have preserved and handed down to him for illustration of his lesson in history to the people yet unborn.